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FOR PUBLIC AFFAIRS STAFF

PROGRAM ABC World News Tonight

STATION WJLA-TV  
ABC Network

DATE January 28, 1985 7:00 P.M. CITY Washington, D.C.

SUBJECT Funding for the Contras

PETER JENNINGS: The Reagan Administration has begun yet another effort to persuade Congress to renew funding for the Contras, those forces trying to overthrow the Sandinista government in Nicaragua. That effort has suffered another setback. The military in next-door Honduras has been looking into the disappearances or the deaths of nearly 250 opponents of the pro-American government in Honduras. There is evidence that Contras may be responsible for at least some of those killings.

ABC News has been investigating, and here is ABC's Mark Potter.

MARK POTTER: The Nicaraguan rebels, called Contras, are fighting the Sandinistas in Nicaragua. But this man, a former Contra intelligence agent, claims he was ordered to kill innocent civilians in nearby Guatemala and Honduras.

TRANSLATOR: Of the people that I know who were eliminated, there were roughly 90 people in a time of about 11 months.

POTTER: Until 1984, he was part of the 15,000-member Nicaraguan Democratic Force, or the FDN, supported by the Reagan Administration, and until recently funded by the CIA.

Past and present members of the FDN now in the United States have told ABC News of criminal activities within the organization that had nothing to do with the military fight. Fearing for their lives, they would only speak under cover. They tell of contract murders, armed robberies, and the executions of civilians by roving bands of intelligence officers answering to the FDN military command.

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FDN sources say most of the abuses were committed in Honduras and Guatemala by a handful of men working for intelligence specialist Colonel Ricardo Lau (?). For years he has been closely aligned with FDN military leader Colonel Enrique Bermudez. Repeated attempts by ABC News to reach these men for comment were unsuccessful.

This former intelligence officer says 60 percent of the victims he knows of in Honduras were Honduran civilians, some accused of being communist sympathizers.

TRANSLATOR: The majority of the 60 percent were university students, private enterprise people.

POTTER: This former Nicaraguan Contra tells of intelligence officers robbing and killing civilians.

TRANSLATOR: They would go to a hotel where they were staying. They would kill them and take away their money.

TRANSLATOR: They made the cause to liberate Nicaragua into a bank to finance their way of life.

POTTER: This man is still with the FDN. He tells of FDN members being killed or forced out of the movement for opposing how the FDN was run.

FDN political leader Adolfo Colero declined a television interview, but by telephone disputed the allegations, calling them a smear campaign, an orchestrated effort to discredit an organization of patriotic Nicaraguans.

Former FDN leaders say they have told the CIA about the abuses.

JOSE CARDENALE: How they were stealing money, how there were some people who were killing people. And they this in the beginning.

POTTER: The CIA has no comment. The State Department says it has been pressuring the FDN leader to clean out what it calls the rotten apples. And FDN members who have come forward to talk say unless the men are ousted, the chances for congressional aid for the movement will evaporate.